

Message Text

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ACTION AF-04

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 INR-05 CIAE-00 NSAE-00 NSC-05
MCT-01 PM-03 DODE-00 SP-02 L-01 /036 W
-----094075 122040Z /50

R 111135Z APR 78
FM AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6143

C O N F I D E N T I A L MOGADISCIO 0785

LIMDIS

NOFORN

DEPT ALSO PASS HORN OF AFRICA COLLECTIVE

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: MOPS, PINS, SO
SUBJ: BACKGROUND OF THE APRIL 9 COUP ATTEMPT

1. THE FOLLOWING BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE APRIL 9 ABORTIVE COUP D'ETAT WAS GIVEN TO THE EMBASSY BY A THIRD-COUNTRY DIPLOMAT WHO HAS BEEN IN REGULAR CONTACT WITH EMBASSY OFFICERS. THE DIPLOMAT, IDENTIFIED SEPARATELY (SECSTATE ONLY), REQUESTED THE INFORMATION BE HELD IN CLOSE CONFIDENCE SINCE IT CAME FROM THE HIGHEST SOMALI SOURCES AND HE HAD NOT YET HAD OPPORTUNITY TO REPORT IT TO EITHER HIS AMBASSADOR OR HIS OWN GOVERNMENT:

2. ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL SOMALI MILITARY SOURCES, THE LEADER OF THE COUP ATTEMPT IN MOGADISCIO ON 9 APRIL 1978 WAS COLONEL MAHMUD SHEIKH OSMAN, THE COMMANDER OF THE AIR DEFENSE OF MOGADISCIO. (EMBASSY COMMENT: DURING THE OGADEN WAR WE UNDERSTAND COL. MAHMUD WAS SENT TO THE FRONT, BUT RESUMED HIS POSITION IN AIR DEFENSE AFTER RHE SOMALI WIRHTDRAWAL FROM THE OGADEN. COL. MAHMUD IS FROM THE MAJERTAIN TRIBE).

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3. COL. MAHMUD USED THE 12TH TANK BATTALION, WHICH ON 9 APRIL HAD A STRENGTH OF 18 TANKS. THESE TANKS WERE JOINED BY SEVEN TANKS FROM THE MOGADISCIO TANK REPAIR SHOP. MAHMUD ALSO USED APPROXIMATELY 300 INFANTRY TROOPS DRAWN FROM A VARIETY OF UNITS AROUND MOGADISCIO.

4. THE COUP ATTEMPT BEGAN AT APPROXIMATELY 0400 LOCAL ON

9 APRIL WHEN INFANTRY TROOPS SEALED OFF THE ENTRANCES TO MOGADISCIO ON THE AFGOI ROAD AND THE BALAD ROAD WHICH LEADS TO THE NORTH. AT APPROXIMATELY 0620 AFTER THE ARREST OF THE 12TH TANK BATTALION COMMANDER BY JUNIOR OFFICERS, TANKS BEGAN TO SURROUND THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE, AND BEGAN SHOOTING AT OTHER TANKS FROM UNITS LOYAL TO SIAD LOCATED IN THE MIOITARY AREA ON THE NORTHWEST OUTSKIRTS OF MOGADISCIO.

5. DURING THE EARLY HOURS OF THE COUP, DEPUTY DEFENSE MINISTER GENERAL OMAR HAJI MOHAMED, OTHER SENIOR OFFICERS, MINISTER OF INFORMATION, ABDISALEM SHEIKH HUSSEIN, PLUS CERTAIN OTHER POLITICAL FIGURES WERE CAPTURED BY THE INSURGENTS. THE GENERAL WAS SEIZED IN HIS VILLA ADJACENT TO THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE. THE INFORMATION MINISTER WAS APPREHENDED WHEN HE ATTEMPTED TO REACH THE TRANSMITTER SITE EARLY THAT MORNING WHILE SEEKING THE CAUSE FOR RADIO MOGADISCIO'S FAILURE TO COME ON THE AIR. BOTH MEN WERE FREED EARLY WHEN SOME OF THE REBEL FORCES HOLDING THEM REALIZED THEY WERE INVOLVED IN A COUP RATHER THAN DEFENSE OF THE GSDR.

6. ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL SOMALI MILITARY SOURCES, THE TIDE TURNED AGAINST THE COUP PLOTTERS WHEN INFANTRY TROOPS INVOLVED IN THE COUP, WHO HAD BEEN TOLD THAT THEY WERE DEFENDING SIAD, REALIZED THAT INSTEAD THEY WERE PARTI-
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CIPATING IN A COUP AGAINST SIAD, AND BEGAN TO FIGHT AGAINST THE PRO-COUP FORCES. THE CREWS OF THE TANKS FROM THE MOGADISCIO WORKSHOP SIMILARLY HAD BELIEVED THEY WERE DEFENDING SIAD, WHEN THEY REALIZED THEIR MISTAKE, THEY TURNED THEIR GUNS ON THE TANKS OF THE 12TH TANK BATTALION.

7. SOMALI MILITARY SOURCES STATE THAT SINCE IT IS BECOMING APPARENT THAT MANY SOLDIERS AND OFFICERS WERE UNWITTING PARTICIPANTS IN THE COUP, BOTH THE SOMALI NATIONAL SECURITY SERVICE AND THE MILITARY INTELLIGENCE WAS CONDUCTING SEARCHING INTERROGATIONS TO DIFFERENTIATE COUP PLOTTERS FROM UNWITTING PARTICIPANTS. THE SAME SOURCES STATE THAT COL. MAHMUD WAS NOT CAPTURED, AND REMAINS A FUGITIVE.

8. AS OF 11 APRIL, THE SITUATION IN MOGADISCIO HAD RETURNED COMPLETELY TO NORMAL. ACCORDING TO SOMALI SOURCES, THE COUP PLOTTERS BELIEVED THAT ONLY CONTROL OF MOGADISCIO WAS NECESSARY TO CONTROL THE ENTIRE COUNTRY, AND THAT THERE WAS THEREFORE NO FIGHTING IN OTHER PARTS OF SOMALIA.
LOUGHRAN

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED TO HORN OF AFRICA COLLECTIVE.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: GOVERNMENT OVERTHROW, BRIEFING MATERIALS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 11 apr 1978
Decaption Date: 20 Mar 2014
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978MOGADI00785
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X1
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780157-0875
Format: TEL
From: MOGADISCIO
Handling Restrictions:
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780470/aaaachuo.tel
Line Count: 116
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: bc9ef0b2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS, NOFORN
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS, NOFORN
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 27 apr 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3010733
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: BACKGROUND OF THE APRIL 9 COUP ATTEMPT
TAGS: MOPS, PINS, SO
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/bc9ef0b2-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014